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UNCLAS YEREVAN 000507

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR EUR/CACEN; DRL

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [OEXC](#) [AM](#)

SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT WITHDRAWS CONTROVERSIAL LAW;  
STUDENTS PROCEED WITH VICTORY RALLY

1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

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SUMMARY  
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2. (SBU) Prime Minister Andranik Margarian announced February 26 that the government would formally withdraw from parliament the controversial "Law on Military Service." Margarian blamed other ministers for failing to explain the benefits of the law clearly, thereby allowing the growing student protests to gain momentum. Students turned an already scheduled demonstration into a victory rally February 27, pledging to remain united and vigilant against any government attempts to re-introduce the law. End Summary.

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PRIME MINISTER WITHDRAWS LAW  
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3. (U) Prime Minister Andranik Margarian withdrew the "Law on Military Service" from the National Assembly on February 26. The announcement came a day after the student group "For the Progress of Science" pledged large demonstrations in the coming days to protest the law, which would remove draft deferments for graduate study. Margarian faulted government ministers, in particular Education Minister Sergo Yeritsian, for failing to adequately explain the law "in a timely or appropriate manner", and build public support for its passage.

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VICTORY RALLY DRAWS 2000  
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4. (U) The student group "For the Development of Science" turned an already-scheduled demonstration against the bill into a victory rally in downtown Yerevan February 27. Approximately 2000 students heard group organizers praise their discipline and unity throughout the campaign, and issue calls for vigilance in case the government were to re-introduce the law. In an address to the crowd, one student praised his peer's "complete unity, which led to our ultimate victory."

5. (SBU) Several leaders of "For the Development of Science" told us at the rally that they were "shocked" the government had backed down so quickly (analysis of the campaign will be provided septel). One student said that they had not yet delivered the thousands of signed form letters to parliamentarians. The students were wary of the government's maneuvers, stating that perhaps the government would re-introduce the bill in the summer when students were on break. They pledged to maintain their movement to monitor any developments.

ORDWAY